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SUBJECT: UPDATE ON KRISAN REFUGEE CAMP

REF: A) 06 ACCRA 1796 B) 05 ACCRA 2585 C) 05 ACCRA 2548

D) 05 ACCRA 2311

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a May 4 visit to Krisan Camp, Ref Coord noted relatively good morale, better access to potable water, and no incidents of sexual- or gender-based violence. There was still no lighting at night and the Camp Clinic has experienced occasional shortages of medication. Resettlement has begun in earnest, with 116 refugees having already been referred to Australia or Canada and the first referrals to the U.S. Resettlement Program starting in April. Relations with local villagers were reserved but civil, but the Sudanese were particularly subject to harassment and travel restrictions. Liberians here, as in Budumburam, were resistant to the notion of repatriation. End Summary.

Health Care

¶2. (SBU) On May 4, Ref Coord visited Krisan Refugee Camp, located in southwestern Ghana, where he observed curtailment in clinic activities due to budgetary cutbacks. Besides facing spot shortages of medication, the clinic was able to refer only the most urgent cases to the local hospital for evaluation and treatment. UN Volunteer Mike Sanderson said that the Sudanese were suffering disproportionately because they refused to eat greens and consequently were susceptible to anemia. NGO's have made up for some of UNHCR's financial straits; for example, earlier this year, a Protestant church group donated USD 1,000 to the clinic.

Relations with the Neighbors

¶3. (SBU) The Ghanaian camp manager described relations with local villagers as "cordial" but refugees listed several problem areas. For example, the local chief initially refused to allow the local burial of an 80-year-old refugee who had passed away; eventually he relented. Many refugees reportedly worked as fishermen's assistants, but after a day's work, the fishermen would refuse to pay them, whether in cash or with a portion of the day's haul. In addition, three village elders recently approached UNHCR, claiming that organization had promised them USD 6,000 and complaining that Ghanaians were not receiving the same benefits as the refugees. Sanderson noted, however, that refugees often mingle and converse freely with local villagers, concluding that despite the occasional misunderstanding, overall relations were civil.

No Lights at Night -- Yet

¶4. (SBU) The camp at night remains totally dark. In April, the new Chair of Ghana's Refugee Board met with officials from the electric company (VRA) and compellingly presented the need for lighting as a security issue, according to Sanderson. Fortunately, there were no new reports of any sexual- or gender-based violence in the camp.

Food and Water

¶5. (SBU) Refugees appeared to have better access to potable drinking water, with several bore holes yielding modest amounts during the current dry season. The World Food Program was supplying full food rations to all refugees, including corn meal, dried beans, oil, and salt. Sanderson confirmed refugees' complaints that there had been some weevil infestation earlier in the year but said spoilage had been minimal.

Resettlement

¶6. (SBU) Resettlement activity has reached a pace not equaled during the previous three years. Some 50 refugees were scheduled to leave for Australia on May 8, while another 66 were pending their Canadian medical clearances. UNHCR has begun referring Togolese and Sudanese Krisan Camp residents to the U.S. Resettlement Program, the first of a promised 100 refugee referrals. The number referred could eventually exceed 100, but the Branch Office has asked a UNHCR expert on Darfur to evaluate several hundred of the Sudanese before it proceeds further.

The Liberians

¶7. (SBU) In his discussions with individual refugees, Ref Coord noticed that the Liberians remained resistant to the notion of repatriation, citing crime, unemployment, property disputes, and generalized fear as reasons for not wanting to return home. Ref

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Coord cautioned that the GOG had not yet decided what kind of status to offer the remaining Liberian refugees. It was possible that they would be treated as other foreigners in having to obtain annual residence permits and pay for medical bills at non-Ghanaian rates at government-run clinics.

The Sudanese

¶8. (SBU) The Sudanese, though mild-mannered and highly self-disciplined, appeared to have more problems. The GOG has not issued refugee ID cards since the last verification exercise in 2003, a decision that has most acutely impacted the Sudanese, since they make up a majority of the newcomers. Two Sudanese refugees were reportedly beaten in unprovoked attacks last year, with locals referring to them as "janjaweed." Though some have managed to reach Accra safely, one policeman threatened the Sudanese, saying, "If you appear at the Axim checkpoint [east of Krisan], we will send you back to Darfur."

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Krisan has come a long way since the November 2005 riot, with only the burned out warehouse remaining as mute testimony to the violence that ravaged the camp. Refugees expressed confidence in UN Volunteer Mike Sanderson and Representative Aida Haile Mariam, with many entertaining high hopes of being resettled in the U.S. While the situation with food, water, and medicine was not ideal, most refugees appeared to be coping adequately and understood UNHCR's budgetary limitations. Post will address the issue of ID cards for the Krisan refugees during its next meeting with the appropriate GOG officials.

BRIDGEWATER